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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Mideast

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Key stories in the media:  
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The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that PM Ehud Olmert said yesterday in Washington that it will soon be possible to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians. HaQaretz reported that Israel is asking President Bush to outline to Barack Obama the reasons for the U.S. commitment to ensure that Israel's strategic

deterrence is not compromised. "I discussed with the president and his most senior staff issues connected to the core of the special relationship between Israel and the U.S., strategic matters of the utmost importance, and the ability to preserve those ties in the coming years," Olmert told reporters yesterday. According to HaQaretz, top administration officials told Olmert there was no point in a presidential letter from Bush, since it would not bind Obama. The sides decided instead on a list, compiled by the White House and delivered to Obama's transition team, that reviews all understandings and agreements. In addition to the Iranian nuclear issue, Israel is also hoping to receive promised military aid and advanced weapons systems, and to restrict the U.S. supply of advanced weapons to Arab states.

HaQaretz reported that the IDF has assassinated wanted men in apparent defiance of High Court of Justice guidelines for such operations. The documents reveal that the IDF approved assassinations in the West Bank even when it could have been possible to arrest the targets and that top-ranking army officers authorized the killings in advance, in writing, even if innocent bystanders would be killed as well. Moreover, the assassination of at least one individual was postponed due to an impending visit by a senior U.S. official. Finally, HaQaretz discovered that contrary to what the state told the High Court, assassinations were subject to only minimal restrictions prior to the court's ruling.

All media reported that an undercover investigation led by Israeli authorities, in cooperation with police from Peru and Spain, has led to the breakup of an international cocaine ring and the largest seizure of drugs in Israeli history. Over a ton and a half of cocaine, estimated to be worth 2 billion shekels (around \$504 million), was seized in three raids around the world. In a separate development, all media reported that yesterday a Thai court sentenced two Israelis to death after convincing them of smuggling 23,000 Ecstasy pills. Yediot cited the DEA's suspicion that the two are linked to crime kingpin Yitzhak Abergil's organization. The Foreign Ministry has said it will intervene in their behalf.

All media reported that today Olmert may present his own plan to secure Israelis pension savings, just a day after the Finance Ministry unveiled its financial bailout package. HaQaretz quoted sources in the Prime Minister's Office as saying that Olmert was dissatisfied with the treasury plan.

Leading media reported that UN General Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann has called for "concrete action" against Israel over the country's treatment of Palestinians. He was quoted as saying that the international community should consider sanctions against Israel including "boycott, divestment and sanctions" similar to those enacted against South Africa two decades ago.

Major media reported that the Labor Party's petitions arbitration court has ordered the cancellation of all reserved spots on the party's Knesset candidates list. This means that Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer's position is no longer safe.

HaQaretz reported that PM Olmert hinted yesterday that the government will not forcibly evacuate settlers from the so-called "House of Contention" in Hebron, but that it will instead settle for preventing settler attacks on their Palestinian neighbors. Yediot reported that yesterday DM Ehud Barak decided that policemen, not soldiers, will evacuate the house. Israel Radio reported that last night dozens of young Jewish settlers vandalized Palestinian property near the house.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday the issue of Amona returned to the High Court of Justice, when 10 Palestinian farmers who own land on the site of the illegal outpost filed a petition, demanding that the government evict the 40 families living on the outskirts of the settlement of Ofra.

Major media cited the state-run Iranian Students News Agency that quoted an Iranian prosecutor as saying that he will request the death sentence for three suspects accusing of spying for Israel. The Jerusalem Post reported that U.S. Ambassador James Cunningham hosted a concert at his residence in tribute to slain Wall Street Journal journalist Daniel Pearl.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the four American citizens running for Knesset in the December 8 Likud primary told a party-related audience yesterday that Israel can learn a lot from the U.S. about how to improve the country.

Israel TV published the results of a Geocartographia poll according to which the Labor Party would shrink from its current 19 seats to 7 seats -Q one seat less than the new Meretz. The poll found that Likud would rise to 37 seats. Kadima, which all polls had credited with 30 seats, dropped to 25.

Makor Rishon cited the results of a special poll conducted by the Center for Ideas and Education at the Berl Katznelson Foundation, through the Market Watch institute: 77 percent of Israelis no longer believe that there is a chance of peace with the Palestinians over the next five years. The lack of belief was prevalent mostly among young people aged 18 to 24 and religious. The poll also found that more than 70 percent of the Israeli public does not believe that there is currently a partner for talks with the Palestinians. Approximately a quarter of the respondents answered that there was a partner for peace. These respondents were mostly secular, traditional, over 65, and with an above-average income. But a surprising number of almost 40 percent of the respondents said that they supported holding peace talks with Hamas. The percentage of those who opposed peace talks with Hamas among slightly more than half of the public is higher among men, the ultra-Orthodox and religious population and those who live in the Jerusalem region.

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Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QAfter the [Israeli] elections the [U.S.] administration will have to work with the winner; [ObamaQs] challenge will be to persuade Netanyahu to act pragmatically and not get into a pointless ideological wrangle with him. And this challenge pales beside the challenge of finding a Palestinian leader reliable and strong enough to sign an agreement and implement it.

Liberal columnist Gadi Taub wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QThere is no way to unilaterally withdraw at the moment. But there is a lot to do in order to prevent ourselves from sinking into the binational mire.

Former Ambassador to the U.S. and former chief negotiator with Syria Prof. Itamar Rabinovich wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: QIf the Israeli-Syrian conflict is to be resolved, and if Damascus is to build a new relationship with Washington as part of the same process, it would take leadership and statesmanship to make it happen.

Gerald M. Steinberg, Executive Director of [www.ngo-monitor.org](http://www.ngo-monitor.org) and chair of the Political Science Department at Bar-Ilan University, wrote in The Jerusalem Post: QIf the Arab states and the Europeans are seriously committed to a peace initiative based on mutual acceptance and an end to conflict, they will need to actively disassociate themselves from ... virulent anti-Israel campaigning.

Block Quotes:  
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1I. "Peace within Reach, Redux"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (11/26): QObama should learn two lessons from this way of doing things (the missed opportunity of 2000]. The first is that plans aren't enough: The public proposal for an Israeli-Palestinian peace published by his close associates is absolutely identical to Bush's positions and the positions of previous presidents. The question is how to turn it into a reality, and no one has found an answer. The second lesson is that leaders' terms of office are short and they must not wait. The expectation that in the three weeks between his inauguration and the Israeli elections Obama will present a peace plan that will convince the

Israelis to vote for QTzipi and not BibiQ [Netanyahu] seems unrealistic and contrary to the way he has conducted himself until now. Obama wants peace, but he also reads public opinion polls. If the trend of the strengthening of the right and the rise of Benjamin Netanyahu continues in Israel, he will not risk public support for a loser. After the elections the administration will have to work with the winner; his challenge will be to persuade Netanyahu to act pragmatically and not get into a pointless ideological wrangle with him. And this challenge pales beside the challenge of finding a Palestinian leader reliable and strong enough to sign an agreement and implement it.

## II. "Negotiations Going Nowhere"

Liberal columnist Gadi Taub wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (11/26): QThe three large [Israeli] parties have ... returned to the same tune: They will boldly strive to achieve an agreement that will ensure peace with security. The parties differ in the price they are willing to pay, but it does not really matter.

We are debating among ourselves over the price of merchandise that the Palestinians do not want to buy. It appeared as if we had awoken from our slumber and understood this after Camp David 2000. It appeared as if we understood that our entire conceptual system was fundamentally flawed -- both on the Right and on the Left. And then we stopped talking about QconcessionsQ that have to be done Qin exchange for peace.Q We slowly but surely understood that things were the reverse of what we thought: It is not that we want a greater Israel and they want partition. Just the opposite: We need partition and the Palestinians want to prevent it. They aspire to an Arab majority throughout the land, and partition will rob them of this.... True, there is no way to unilaterally withdraw at the moment. But there is a lot to do in order to prevent ourselves from sinking into the binational mire. We can complete the construction of the fence already, start bringing back the settlers and leave the army on the other side until a way is found to prevent rocket terror. Zionism is a serious matter. This movement knew how to make decisions. A real leadership would not let a handful of settlers and several tin rockets crash the Zionist vessel into binational shoals.

## III. "How Not to Negotiate with Syria"

Former Ambassador to the U.S. and former chief negotiator with Syria Prof. Itamar Rabinovich wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (11/26): QWith Syria, early public discussion of an idea to be raised in the negotiation is likely to undermine it.... A second lesson, hardly an earthshaking discovery, was that you must not appear too eager for the deal. This immediately raises the price. From this perspective, whoever leaked the [defense establishmentQs] document [this week] to HaQaretz has weakened Israel's hand in the negotiation with Syria. This does not mean that a negotiation of this importance can or should be conducted in total secrecy, and that a signed and sealed deal should be delivered to a stunned public. Public diplomacy is an essential part of any negotiation and conflict resolution. But so is secret diplomacy. If the Israeli-Syrian conflict is to be resolved, and if Damascus is to build a new relationship with Washington as part of the same process, it would take leadership and statesmanship to make it happen. Secret diplomacy (for the parties to establish the fundamentals of the deal) and public diplomacy (to prepare the ground for painful concessions and anticipated gains) would have to be sequenced carefully if the process is to succeed against many odds.

## IV. "Arab Peace or Durban War?"

Gerald M. Steinberg, Executive Director of [www.ngo-monitor.org](http://www.ngo-monitor.org) and chair of the Political Science Department at Bar-Ilan University, wrote in The Jerusalem Post (11/26): QAs the Annapolis negotiations end without apparent progress, hopes for peace are refocusing around the revived 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. But while the promoters of this effort highlight the breakthrough in accepting the legitimacy of Israel and an end of conflict, many of our potential Arab partners are promoting demonization through another round of the Durban process. The use of terms like Qapartheid,Q anti-Semitism both new and old, and efforts to promote academic and other boycotts are the exact opposite of the peace arrangements proclaimed in the Arab initiative.... In declaring the failure of efforts to prevent

the second Durban conference from emulating the first, the Israeli government has set down a clear marker. If the Arab states and the Europeans are seriously committed to a peace initiative based on mutual acceptance and an end to conflict, they will need to actively disassociate themselves from such virulent anti-Israel campaigning.

MORENO